



Refuge Reporter

Happenings at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Volume 6, Issue 2

Centennial Celebration! Set for March 15, 2003

By Becky Goche, Park Ranger

The National Wildlife Refuge System is celebrating its Centennial on March 14, 2003. Shiawassee NWR is planning a big day of fun and celebration on Saturday, March 15. **Centennial Celebration!** will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street in Saginaw.

Numerous family-oriented events are planned throughout the day. Best of all, the activities are free! Joe Rogers will be doing "Live Birds of Prey" shows at 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. The U.S. Postal Service will be offering special "Second Day of Issue" stamp cancellation of the Pelican Island NWR stamp from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. This is the only location for this in the State of Michigan! Jeff Sommer of the Saginaw County Historical Society will be doing a program on the pre-

history of the Refuge. Denny Brooks will present a program on butterflies. Cherri Allen of Cherri's Feed and Seed will present a program on bird feeding. Saginaw County Parks and Recreation Commission will be helping children tie flies all day long. Ducks Unlimited will be teaching children how to use duck calls. The Central Michigan Hunting Retriever Club will have hunting dog demonstrations. The Michigan Duck Hunters Association will be accepting Jr. Duck Stamp applications. The Refuge time capsule will be dedicated with items from the Refuge and local children. Bird banding demonstrations, guided hikes, puppets, and lots of other children's activities are planned. The Friends of Shiawassee NWR will be selling commemorative Centennial items and refreshments during the day. Be sure to look at the enclosed flyer for more information concerning this special day.

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Special Points:

- *International Migratory Bird Day Celebration is May 10.*
- *Teachers - Be sure to check our website to see what kind of educational programs we offer. Now's the time to plan and schedule your field trips for this Spring!*

Volunteers Needed to Help with Upcoming Events

Attention Refuge Volunteers! Are you looking for a short-term volunteer opportunity? We will need help with the **Centennial Celebration!** on March 15. We need people to help us with setup on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. We will need people to help with tear down and clean up immediately after the event on Saturday. We need some friendly peo-

ple to help greet and direct visitors throughout the day. We need patient and kid-friendly people to help with children's activities. We will also need help with International Migratory Bird Day on May 10. We hope to have an auto tour plus other activities and will need lots of volunteers. If you can help out or need more information, please call Becky Goche at

Law Enforcement Corner: Building New Relationships with Other Agencies

By Kevin Shinn, Refuge Officer

The new year has been about program building and relationships. As the first full-time law enforcement officer for the Refuge complex, I have had the opportunity to expand and build on the law enforcement program. On the top of the list has been building relationships with other local law enforcement agencies and establishing radio communications. The Refuge land base extends into multiple jurisdictions throughout the State of Michigan including Federal, State, County, City, and Township. I have been making efforts to meet and establish lines of communication with all of the involved agencies. Saginaw County, Michigan DNR, and Michigan State Police have the most shared responsibility. All have been extremely helpful and have exemplified beyond my expectations the unity shared between law enforcement officers. Saginaw County has offered 24-hour radio dispatching with their 911 program, access to many of their top notch LE units and reporting systems, and the opportunity to meet their LE staff. I have met with two of the Special Agents for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and look forward to working closely with them on many Federal natural resource investigations. Lt. Al Marble of the Michigan DNR has shared my desire to build a strong working relationship between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the DNR. I look forward to working with the local Conservation Officers on state violations in the area and having access to their state-wide radio dispatching system when working the Detroit River and the Michigan Islands. As we speak, work on an agreement between the State of Michigan and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking place that when complete will provide even further assistance for our two agencies to assist each other around the state. Meetings are planned with the Michigan State Police, Spaulding Township, Bridgeport Township, Thomas Township, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Border Patrol, and eventually many of the Detroit area agencies.

The winter season is a much more quiet season on the Refuge. Winter activities include cross-country skiing and hiking on Refuge trails, bird watching, photography, and ice fishing and snowmobiling on the navigable waters. However, even with the number of recreational opportunities available, the cold keeps many away. Resource violations have been down also and hopefully will stay down with increased visibility of law enforcement. Violations for the season include excessive snowmobile speeds on the river, illegal trespass on the Refuge with ATV and snowmobile, walking dogs on the Refuge, illicit activity in the parking areas, and hiking on the trails after hours. Many of these violations can be avoided by simply paying attention to the Refuge regulations. Remember, Refuge hours are from sunrise to sunset, pets are prohibited, and obey

the posted signs at all times. This is a wildlife refuge and these rules are established to protect the wildlife and their habitat, as well as providing safety and courtesy to those of us that enjoy using it.

Snowmobiling has become a hot topic this season. Recently we had several unfortunate accidents in the vicinity of the Refuge with one resulting in a death and others with air-lift or ambulance emergency evacuations.

Local agencies will be meeting to create an emergency response plan and to address the enforcement of the snowmobile use in the area. Currently, snowmobiling is not allowed on Refuge lands as it is not a compatible use according to Federal Regulations; however,

it is allowed on the navigable waters of the Saginaw, Shiawassee, Flint, Tittabawassee, and Cass Rivers, and Swan Creek waterways. An increase in snowmobile enforcement will be implemented as Michigan CO's and I begin to cooperatively work the waterways.

A land exchange between the State of Michigan and the Shiawassee NWR took place late last year including the boat launch site along the Cass River at M-13. A Refuge entrance sign and public access regulation signs have been ordered and will be put into place very soon. Now that the site is part of the Refuge, administration will be according to Refuge Regulations and Federal Code. The Refuge plans to improve the parking area, clean up the trash and debris, and build a hiking trail to compliment the fishing and boating activities at the site. All prohibited acts will be enforced including the non-compatible snowmobile use. Once signs are in place, I will be spending time at this site in order to make sure the message reaches all of the users.

Have fun, be safe, importantly, make legal! Hope to see there.



and most sure it is you out

"Snowmobiling has become a hot topic this season."

Some things that fly there be - Birds - Hours - the Bumblebee Emily Dickinson

By David Peters, Tractor Operator

Spring is a time of great awakening at Shiawassee NWR, as inhabitants that have been stilled by the cold begin to stir. The refuge's insects have over-wintered in all stages of life - egg, larva, pupae, and adult. It is the latter of these that are most visible on those first warm vernal days - mourning cloaks, ladybird beetles, and of course, bumblebees.

Actually, queen bumblebees to be exact, for they are the only bumblebees whose lives span from autumn to the following spring. They emerge from their winter slumber underground and immediately begin foraging for the nectar and pollen that they need to begin raising the next generation. The refuge is well suited to bumblebees, because the dense stands of early spring flowering willows that occur here provide ample food at this particularly critical time in a queen bumblebee's life. As she obtains the food resources needed to begin reproduction, the queen then begins to search for a suitable nest site. This is when we often first notice bumblebees each spring, as they fly low over the ground, inspecting holes, crevices, and such. Nest site selection varies somewhat among the twelve species of the genus *Bombus* that occur in Michigan. Any number of situations might be chosen for use, as long as it is sunny, dry, and provides a secure surrounding. Once a site is selected, the tennis ball sized nest cavity is formed, upon the floor of which the queen constructs several wax cells, which she provisions with pollen, and then lays a single egg in each. These are fertilized eggs; the result of mating that took place the previous autumn, and they will hatch as females, the colony's workforce that will forage for the queen and assist her with nest duties, including defense.

Although their social way of life sets bumblebees apart from other native North American bees, which are solitary, they otherwise share many bee traits with them, including the ability to sting. Bumblebees have stingers, (that is to say the females do, but not the males), but they seldom use them. Being strictly flower feeders, they are far from aggressive, unlike their predatory relatives the hornets and wasps. Thus, close examination of a bumblebee visiting flowers will usually be tolerated, and if not, the bee will signal her discomfort by raising her middle legs.

As summer arrives, the bumblebees we observe are noticeably smaller in size. These are the female workers. The queen no longer leaves her nest, relying on her daughters to forage and supply the family with pollen for the larva, and nectar for the adults. Similar to the non-native honey bee, bumblebees carry the pollen they collect

on their hind legs, which have a smooth concave surface surrounded by stiff hairs for this purpose. However, unlike honey bees, the nest they return to has minimal storage capacity, often only enough sustenance for a few inclement days.

Sometime during the summer, the nest switches over from producing workers, to raising reproductive bumblebees. The larvae chosen to be queens are identical to those of worker females; they are just fed more and brooded longer. To produce males, the queen lays unfertilized eggs. Male bumblebees do not assist with nest duties; they leave a few days after emergence to seek mates, and do not return to the nest. These are the bumblebees one finds on the late summer evenings, asleep on the very flowers they are foraging upon. The young queens linger in nest to build up the large body that will allow them to store energy for over-wintering, then they leave to mate. Over a year old now, (a long, full life in bee terms) the original queen passes on, along with any remaining workers. Well fed with the resources needed for hibernation, the new queen selects a secure spot underground where she settles in to await the arrival of the next spring.

The conservation of pollinators, including bumblebees, is seldom if ever even considered by the general public. Yet the service they provide is an absolutely critical one, as the majority of flowering plants require the visit by a pollinator in order to produce seed and fruit. This encompasses not only natural plant communities, but agricultural crops as well. Bumblebees themselves are the most effective pollinators of tomatoes, blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, field beans, and red clover. Shiawassee NWR contributes to pollinator conservation by maintaining natural habitats, by prohibiting the use of pesticides, by minimizing competition from non-native honey bees, and of course, by providing ample willow blossoms for the bumblebee queens that are soon to awaken.

"The conservation of pollinators, including bumblebees, is seldom if ever even considered by the general public."



The “Unwanted” Insect

By Doug Spencer, Refuge Manager

Many of us are thinking that winter will never end, but believe me, it will. The warmer days are coming and soon to follow will be bird watching, fishing, boating and hiking on the refuge trails. It will be exciting to see, hear and feel the wildlife returning. Yet, there is one that many of us are not excited to see, hear or feel – the woodland/marsh mosquito. Most people do not realize how important the mosquito is to many other species on the refuge. They are an important food source in the “food web” of the wildlife that use the refuge.

The Saginaw County Mosquito Abatement Commission (SCMAC) will soon begin their annual treatment programs, beginning with the widespread aerial application of the larvicide known as Bti, followed by numerous applications of adulticides in our neighborhoods throughout the summer. Bti is an organic pesticide that is lethal to the larval stage of mosquitoes in water conditions, but it can also have an effect on some other invertebrates found on the refuge. For the first time in years, the refuge will not allow the SCMAC to apply the pesticide for these nui-

sance mosquitoes. Our policy will be to control mosquitoes in the event of a human health emergency that can directly be linked to the mosquitoes that are coming from the refuge. If the County of Saginaw informs the refuge that there is a health emergency and the disease (such as West Nile Virus) is coming from mosquitoes on the refuge, the SCMAC will be allowed to control these species by whatever treatment is necessary to control the disease.

We recommend that while visiting the refuge during mosquito hatches, you use an insect repellent. This will help you to enjoy your visit to the wilds of the refuge. If you forget your repellent, the Friends of Shiawassee NWR will have some available for purchase at the refuge headquarters off of Curtis Road.

“Our policy will be to control mosquitoes in the event of a human health emergency...”

178 Deer Harvested on the Refuge in 2002 Hunting Season

By Jim Dastyck, Refuge Biologist

During the 2002 deer hunting season on the Refuge, a total of 784 hunters harvested 178 deer during the fifteen hunt periods. The hunters spent 2,162 days and 16,232 hours in the field to harvest the deer. Each participant was randomly picked from thousands of applicants through a priority point software program. Each individual hunter selected one of fifteen, two or five day, mini hunt seasons when he or she applied in early September. The seasons were designated as either archery, shotgun, or muzzleloader hunts and covered 37 days scattered throughout the months of November and December.

Of special note were two non-ambulatory hunts held during the first four days of the firearms deer season in mid-November. This hunt is only open to hunters who are confined to wheelchairs. Thirty-three participants harvested 10 deer. This special program is strongly supported by the local community and organizations. Several volunteers donate hundreds of hours assisting with this hunt. In 2001, the National Wild Turkey Federation agreed to sponsor this event with their affiliate Wheeling Sportsman. They highlighted the uniqueness of the program by designating the hunts as one of their national featured projects. Hunters participating in this program

face many unique problems to enjoy a sport most people take for granted.



Refuge Biologist Jim Dastyck (back center) with a successful hunter and a few of the volunteers who helped with the 2002 hunt. Volunteers are extremely important to the success of this program.

How Clean Is Your Bird Feeder?

By Becky Goche, Park Ranger

Is your bird feeder a breeding ground for disease? Salmonella bacterium could be lurking there, if you're not careful. Salmonella is responsible for numerous die-offs of song birds nationwide each year. The National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI offers three important recommendations regarding salmonella bacterial infections in birds.

First, this bacterium can infect nearly all pets, livestock and persons; therefore, pets (especially cats) should not be allowed to eat or come in contact with sick and dead song birds because they could develop salmonella bacterial infections.

Second, persons can be infected by salmonella bacteria, so strict personal hygiene must be practiced by persons that handle the bird feeders, sick and dead birds, and any bird droppings around the bird feeders. Good personal hygiene means thoroughly washing the hands after handling birds and bird feeders, and washing any clothing that comes into contact with bird droppings.

And third, the National Wildlife Health Center and many

other wildlife experts recommend that only those bird feeders that are easily removed, washed and disinfected should be used to feed song birds. Washing and disinfecting bird feeders should be done at least weekly, and more often if bird droppings tend to accumulate on the feeder.

After thoroughly washing the bird feeder with soap and water (to remove droppings and moldy feed), the feeder can be disinfected in a bleach solution (half cup bleach in one gallon of water).

In addition, bird feeders should be moved around in the yard regularly to prevent build up of potentially contagious bird droppings under the feeders. You should also dispose of seed hulls beneath the feeders to prevent build up.

If any persons or pets develop "symptoms" of salmonella bacterial infection (cramps, intense diarrhea, weakness, fever) after handling sick/dead birds or the bird feeder,

"Washing and disinfecting bird feeders should be done at least weekly..."

Kids' Free Fishing Fun Day Set for Saturday, June 7

By Becky Goche, Park Ranger

Get your fishing poles dusted off! The 23rd annual "Great Saginaw River Free Fishing Fun Day" will be held on Saturday, June 7, 2003, at Ojibway Island in Saginaw, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. This contest is open to children aged 3- to 15-years-old. Children will have a chance to win prizes with the fish they catch. The more they catch, the better their chances of winning! Prizes in past years have included bicycles, fishing poles, camping equipment, games, and sporting equipment.

Children will need to furnish their own fishing poles and bait. There will be a limited supply of free bait available. Free refreshments like cookies, snocones and orange drink will also be available. There will be a small charge for hot dogs.

Numerous partners, including the Refuge, will be involved in putting on this event – The Saginaw News, City of Saginaw, Meijer Stores, Saginaw Field and Stream Club, Sons of Italy, the Dow Chemical Michigan Division

Walleye Club and others. Partners organize the event and provide prizes, food, tents, bait and volunteer labor the day of the event.

The Free Fishing Fun Day coincides with Michigan's "Free Fishing Weekend," June 7 and 8, 2003. During this weekend, you don't need a fishing license to fish.



Prescribed Burning - It's Not What It Used to Be

By Rick McAvinchey, Refuge Wildlife Technician

Like most wildlife refuges, as well as national forests and national parks, Shiawassee NWR maintains a variety of habitat types. Not counting the Cass River Unit in Bridgeport, there are at least 1327 acres of wetlands and moist soil units, and at least 444.55 acres of grassy upland areas that we maintain, or hope to maintain in herbaceous vegetation. If these areas are left to natural succession, woody plants such as willows and cottonwoods would eventually take over, converting these open grassy areas to forest. Besides mowing and discing, one of the tools we use to keep down the woody vegetation is prescribed fire.

In the past the criteria for doing prescribed burns were pretty simple. It was not uncommon for Refuge staff to decide on a warm spring day that it would be a good day to burn, and just go light a field or the side-slopes of dikes. Even in those days there had to be an approved prescribed fire plan, which described in general terms the weather and fuel conditions and the firing methods and crew needed to carry out a safe burn. I have worked on prescribed burns in jack pine forests in Michigan for Kirtland's Warbler habitat, and on black spruce burns in Alaska for moose habitat, both types being potentially dangerous burning. Burning on our Refuge, with water, roads and dikes all around, seemed relatively easy and safe.

All this relatively carefree burning ended in spring 2000, when the federal agencies developed new stringent guidelines for prescribed burns. Within months, the National Park Service prescribed burn fiasco near Las Alamos, NM put greater emphasis on this more careful, thoughtful approach to burn planning and implementation. Prescribed

burn plans written under these more stringent standards take several times as long to write and go through the approval process. In the 1998-2000 period we burned at least 580 acres, plus several miles of dike sides. In 2001 we burned about 28 acres, and burned no acres in 2002, due more to the uncooperative weather and inability to assemble fire-qualified staff members than to the new standards for burn plans. Our largest single burn unit is Pool 2, over 430 acres, and the smallest is 0.55 acre at Green Point ELC.

"To catch the reader's attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here."

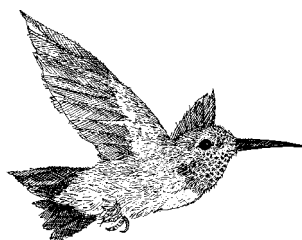
Last summer I worked on the Rodeo-Chediski wildfire in Arizona, which burned over 480,000 acres and over 460 homes. This and other very large fires such as the Hayman fire in Colorado are largely the result of a great buildup of fuel in many forested areas of the country over the past century of fire suppression. The town of Show-Low, AZ, where I was stationed, came very close to being burned over. Traumatized area residents have a new appreciation for prescribed fire, which along with forest thinning is used to reduce fuel buildups and avert such huge runaway fires. Thinning and burning small areas creates fire breaks, and saves critical wildlife habitats from sudden loss in large devastating fires.

Prescribed fire will continue to be an important tool in maintaining early successional stages on the Refuge and many private and public lands in Michigan, and in reducing fuel buildups in other parts of North America. We

Animal Facts - The Ruby-throated Hummingbird

By Michelle Vander Haar, Park Ranger

Did you know the Ruby-throated Hummingbird...
...is the only bird to fly backwards and hover in one spot,
...is the only hummingbird to nest east of the Mississippi River,
...is only 3 ½" long,
...females are green on top and white on bottom,
...will not stay through the winter if you leave your feeders out; they will instinctively migrate unless they are unhealthy,
...nests are made of plant down, held together by spider



silk and covered with lichens,
...has the largest heart in relation to its body size compared to any other animal,
...scientific name is *Archilochus colubris*,
...migrates to southern Mexico and as far south as Costa Rica,
...males usually arrive at wintering grounds 8-10 days ahead of the females.

Friends Group Increases Number of Board of Directors to Fifteen

By Janine Spencer, Friends' Board of Directors

The Friends of Shiawassee NWR recently participated at the "Huntin' Expo" at the Birch Run Convention Center. Many Friends and Centennial items were sold and membership forms were handed out to hundreds of interested visitors. This was a great opportunity for the Friends and Refuge staff to inform the public of the upcoming National Wildlife Refuge Centennial events to be held at Shiawassee NWR and the new Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in the Detroit/Windsor area. Many thanks to Ed Becker, Rich Hodge, Dan Patillo, Steve MacAlpine, Dale Adams, and Joe Davila for setting up the booth and staffing it for the entire weekend. Thousands of visitors viewed the display.

The Board members want to thank all of the members of the Friends Group for the numerous favorable responses to increase the Board of Directors from 12 members to 15. The increase in Board of Directors will help manage all of the tasks to put on successful Centennial events that are expected this year. It will also help bring into the group additional experienced individuals which will help lead the Friends into the new century of conservation and public programs on the Shiawassee NWR.

Chuck Hoover, former Director of the Castle Museum in the City of Saginaw, Steve MacAlpine, longtime volunteer for the Shiawassee NW Refuge and outdoors enthusiast, and Larry Abraham, avid bird watcher with the Saginaw Valley Audubon Society and local high school teacher have all volunteered to be new Board of Directors. Bob Grefe is a Board of Director and long time volunteer for the refuge, Richard Hodge is the Board's Treasurer, and Kim LeBlanc is the Board's Vice President, all of which are up for re-election. Voting for these individuals will take place soon.

Dan Patillo, Board of Director, recently submitted a \$10,000 grant proposal to the Saginaw Community Foundation for trail development and a marketing plan for the Cass River Unit of the Refuge in Bridgeport for the proposed Great Lakes Discovery Center development. Dan is a student at Central Michigan University and has spent a lot of time putting the grant together and getting the University involved in this important effort.

Refuge Manager Doug Spencer and Refuge Biologist Jim Dastyck recently attended the annual National Friends Conference in Washington, D.C. Friends from the Detroit River also attended as well as hundreds of other individuals representing Friend groups throughout the U.S. There were some excellent breakout sessions concerning increasing the membership of the organization, fund rais-

ing, media contacts, and development of visitor centers for your refuge. There are plans to have a Midwest Friends' Conference this Spring at the Neil Smith NWR in Des Moines, IA. Anyone interested in representing our Friends at this conference should contact the Board. Plans are already underway for next year's Annual National Friends' Conference to be held in Washington, D.C. Please plan on being there next year. It's a lot of fun and a great learning experience for all Friend members.

Upcoming Events

From February 21 to March 2, one of the biggest indoor events for outdoor recreation, Outdoorama will be held in Novi. The Friends and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will present displays and showcase their Refuge activities. Anyone interested in helping out please contact the Board.

Board meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next Board meeting will be March 12, at 7:00 p.m. at Green Point ELC. Everyone is invited to attend.

On March 15, the Refuge and the Friends are celebrating the National Wildlife Refuge System's Centennial at Green Point ELC. The celebration will be from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Friend members are encouraged to attend and help with the event.

On May 10, the Refuge and the Friends are celebrating the International Migratory Bird Day at the Refuge. This is a fun day both for children and adults. Please plan on attending. The Friends will need help assisting the Refuge staff in various activities.

On June 18, don't miss coming to the first Friends Cook-out at the Refuge's Cass River Unit in Bridgeport. The Friends plan to provide an old fashion country cookout. The picnic will be on the proposed site for the Great Lakes Discovery Center behind the Cracker Barrel Restaurant and the Baymont Motel off of Dixie Highway. The picnic will be from 4:00 p.m. until dark. Games, displays and hiking trails will be available for your fun and recreation. All the funds raised from this event will go for the development of the new visitor center and facilities on the Cass River Unit. Contact the Friends for more information.

"Your membership is important to us and the Refuge! Membership fees and cash donations go towards Refuge projects..."

Shiawassee NWR
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Hours: M - F, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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We're on the web!
[Http://midwest.fws.gov/
shiawassee](http://midwest.fws.gov/shiawassee)



*Celebrating a
Century
of Conservation!*



Teachers: There's Still Time to Schedule the *Centennial Celebration!* in Your School

by Becky Goche, Park Ranger

The National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) System, America's only system of federal lands set aside specifically for wildlife, is turning 100 years old on March 14, 2003. Shiawassee NWR is one of over 535 refuges found throughout the U.S. and it's right in your backyard.

There is still time for your school to host the ***Centennial Celebration! School Assembly Program.*** Refuge staff come into your school and present an educational and entertaining program. Students of all ages will enjoy this program as they learn about the history of wildlife conservation in the U.S. They will watch a video on the history of the NWR System, learn about activities that people can do on Refuges, and earn prizes for their schools and themselves as they discover Refuges across the U.S. through a fun, trivia contest. Best of all, this program is FREE!

This program is only available through the end of March, 2003. This program has been very popular, but we do have a few slots still open in March. We request that schools coordinate an assembly program for multiple grades that can be done in a large room. Schools will need to provide a VCR, TV and/or projection TV, possibly a PA system (depending on the size of the room and the number of students) and two tables.

To reserve your spot, call the Green Point Environmental Learning Center at (989) 759-1669. For more information about this and other programs we have planned for the Centennial, see inside or visit our website at <http://midwest.fws.gov/shiawassee>.